European Civil Society's Conundrum: Public Spheres, Identities and the Challenge of Politicisation

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Abstract *This work draws upon the novel theoretical framework of European civil society which is based on the complementary concept of civil society. It claims that relations between the Europeanised public spheres, political identities and the politicisation of the EU present an intricate and crucial conundrum of the European civil society. While applying such a theoretical framework this work interprets the Europeanisation of identities, public spheres and national polities as mutually reflexive processes. The well-respected concept of positive identity (Erikson) and the civil code of collective identity (Shils) are deployed in order to understand dynamics between the public sphere and identities trans/formations. Finally, the concept of active border is introduced as the key component of the European civil society, and as a vital nexus within the conceptual cluster of identity, the public sphere and the Europeanisation.*

Introduction

Both the EU´s representatives (and the EU´s documents) and many civil society scholars predominantly conceptualise a European civil society as interest groups and social movements (or, just as NGOs) operating in the European transnational context.[1] Disadvantages of such reductionist conceptualisation are plentiful, but first of all it suffers

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from the lack of sociological dynamism and ignores a reflexive-like nature in relations between political institutions and social agency.

The aim of this article is to apply *a novel* theoretical framework of a European civil society. The theoretical background for that is grounded in the complementary approach towards the civil society concept (which is inspired mainly by Tocqueville's social theory and Giddens theory of reflexive modernity), and which I have presented earlier.[2] To start with, I will summarise a robust normative perspective on the concept of civil society. On the silhouette of the outlined normative perspective I will draw the major institutional and socio-cultural preconditions of an emerging civil society in the (European) transnational context. I believe that this view is capable of grasping the issue in its complexity and explaining structural aspects of the problem, whilst taking into account the situation of specific social actors in its broader contextual framework.

In the second step I will discuss a particular aspect of the European civil society: reflexive relations between the construction of European public sphere, the formation of transnational identities and the politicisation of the EU. Relations between public sphere, collective identity and the claim of politicisation present an intricate and puzzling conundrum of a European civil society. Conventional approach towards relations between public sphere, collective identity and polity has been imbued by a sort of essentialism. Until recently, such approach has been very salient in European studies discourse and has utterly dominated laypersons public debates on European integration. It presumes that the formation of the transnational public sphere is the precondition for the emergence of a transnational (European) polity, and that the formation of transnational (European) collective identities is the necessary precondition for the emergence of transnational (European) public sphere. In other words, such approach contends that if there is no collective identity, there cannot be any public sphere and if there is no public sphere, there cannot be any democratic polity. This linear-like logic among "identities – public spheres – polities" has been particularly salient in discussions about, for instance, the so called democratic deficit, or the no-demos debates.

Utilising the theoretical background of the complementary concept of civil society, the main structural argument of this article asserts that Europeanisation of identities, public spheres and nation states are parallel and mutually reflexive processes. I reinforce the argument pre-

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sented and empirically supported by Thomas Risse that the formation of Europeanised public spheres and identities has been feeding from each other.[3] I believe that the Europeanisation of public spheres and identities could complement each other towards a more effective and accountable democratic governance in the EU. Furthermore, I defend and develop the argument which has been suggested by many scholars,[4] that a deeper politicisation of the EU could reinforce the Europeanisation of both public spheres and identities.[5]

To sum up, applying the complementary account of the European civil society, I will assert the four following hypotheses: 1) the formation of the European public sphere and the Europeanisation of public spheres in the EU are synergic and parallel processes; 2) the Europeanisation of public spheres is conducive for Europeanisation of identities, and porous active borders are the key component of these processes; 3) the Europeanisation of public spheres could be interpreted as a form of re/politicisation of public spheres in the EU; in other words the deficit of a single European public sphere is actually the deficit of public spheres in the EU; and 4) the politicisation of the EU could reinforce the Europeanisation of public spheres and collective identities.

The Complementary Account on the European Civil Society

In order to follow the four above mentioned hypotheses, the complementary theory of European civil society is important for both theoretical and empirical analysis. This framework of analysis offers the broad sociological context in which questions about the Europeanisation should be discussed in order to identify and understand relations between identities, public spheres and polities' trans/formations.

Reconstructing Tocqueville's social theory we can find the four functional dimensions between civil society and democratic polity: defensive, participative, legitimising, and integrative dimensions.[6] These four functional dimensions are cited with various degrees of emphasis by all authors dealing with the issue of civil society; most distinctively by authors such as Taylor or Walzer.[7] Let us summarise these four dimensions.

Civil society should above all be capable of acting as a defence against the potential expansionism of political power. It is part of the European historical experience that every power, often in the name

of efficiency and the ability to mobilise itself, maintains a tendency to gravitate towards centralisation; this increases the risk of the abuse of power. This is where the defensive function of civil society comes into play.

A second dimension is the participative function. Civil society ought to facilitate the more effective involvement of citizens in the public sphere than established political parties. Broadly based civic participation may consist of the massive mobilisation of resources that is facilitated by the widespread dissemination of information and knowledge.

The legitimising function of civil society is based on the fact that civil society through its independence and autonomy creates the social resources for political power and provides democratic legitimacy to the government (or to the state). The power of the government is only legitimate when it is able to enjoy the trust of its citizens. The extra-political and independent status of civil society guarantees that political power is executed 'rationally'. Public opinion has a binding and normative character for political power. But in order to be able to form public opinion, civil society must constitute a relatively large structure within which social interests and priorities are consistently articulated, agreed upon, and verified.

The last, but by no means the least important expectation associated with civil society is the fact that, within it, relationships of affinity and loyalty are formed, and this is civil society's integrative function. Through repeated involvement in the workings of civil society citizens eventually come to realise that in order for their voice to be heard and their interests to be taken into account they need to join forces with others. This in turn engenders a sense of belonging to or affinity with an interest group. More broadly there then emerges a sense of belonging to a broader societal context and identifying with the given political system. Civil society creates room for the reproduction of shared symbols, values, and norms.

Inspired by Giddens' approach to an analysis of the nature of contemporary modern societies,[8] I define the functional dimensions in relations between civil society and the democratic state as depicted below in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Functional Dimensions in Relations between Civil Society and Democratic Polity
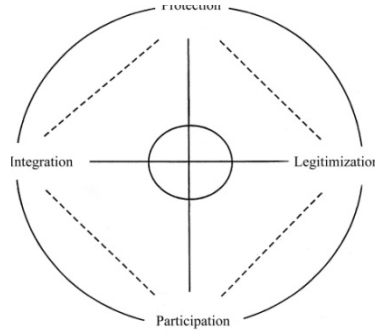
In this figure the outer circle represents the whole of civil society, and the small circle around the centre represents the sphere of political power, i.e. the sphere of the control of information and social surveillance. The above mentioned functions of civil society can be plotted in the figure as follows: at the top end of the vertical axis (of "agency") there is the protective or defensive function, which is an analogy of the concept of 'negative freedom' (Giddens calls it emancipatory politics).[9] At the opposite end of the vertical axis is the participative function, which, conversely, corresponds to the concept of 'positive freedom' (corresponding to Giddens' 'life politics'). The legitimising function of civil society is at the right end of the horizontal axis (of "trust"), the entire right half of which indicates the mutual dependency and interconnectedness of civil society and the democratic polity. At the left end of the horizontal axis there is social integration, the value which expresses the fact that civil society is capable of reproducing and integrating itself as a society, but also illustrates the fact that civil society is integrated within the framework of a single political system.[10]

Silhouetted against Figure 1 it is possible to structure the concept of a European civil society. Four dimensions of civil society on a European level correspond to the following notions: along the vertical axis of "agency" these are (1) the European public sphere, and (2) multilevel civil society, and along the horizontal axis of "trust" these are (3) multilevel (polycentric) governance, and (4) European identity. Each of these dimensions represents a vast research field which encompasses a cluster of problems and questions. The following Figure 2 suggests a conceptual interpretative framework for both a theoretical and empirical analysis of the dynamics and mutual relations between the above mentioned four dimensions. In the following, I will focus on the

conceptual frameworks of the European public sphere and European identity as well as their links in relation to the sphere of political power and to the context of individual actors.

Figure 2: Dimensions of European Civil Society
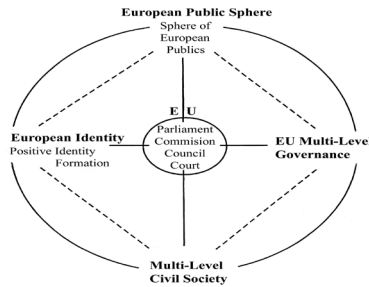
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Sphere of European Publics (hypothesis 1)

Concerns about democracy are one of the most important reasons why we should care about transforming collective identities and public spheres in Europe in the first place. Democracy without a public and without shared sense of community of communication is most likely not a viable option.[11] Let us start with the first hypothesis, which asserts that the formation of the European public sphere and the Europeanisation of public spheres in the EU are synergic and parallel processes.

It has been frequently argued and demonstrated that the "psychological existence" of the EU as an imagined community is still lacking, compared to well- established nation states. Nevertheless, there is plenty of empirical evidence that, particularly in the last two decades, the EU has seen some significant changes and shifts in the formation of its collective identity as well as in the transformation of its public spheres. Due to constitutional debates, issues of the Euro implementation, Eastern enlargements and the world economic and the Euro currency crises, the symbolic visibility of the EU, in addition to the media reporting on a "European common concerns" have increased significantly. As Koopmans and Statham research has shown, by comparison to national actors, European institutions and politics has been adequately visible.[12]

A Conceptual Account of the European Public Sphere

Nevertheless, it seems true that the European public sphere is still rather weak and underdeveloped on the one hand, but on the other, there is little doubt that the last two decades have definitely "dissolved the marriage" between the state and its public sphere. Nation states have lost their monopolies in controlling flows of social interactions and creating a "meaningful" framework of communications. Furthermore, recent developments have even questioned the crucial role of the public sphere as the guarantor of political power being exercised in a reasonable and accountable manner.[13] Although main stream public opinion is not formed on the basis of critical deliberation, it still remains the major political force which is to be respected and looked after. The whole essence of democracy stands and fails with public opinion, which should not be taken for granted. We should not expect that public opinion simply exists (as an aggregate of private opinions). Rather, we need to ask how to treat the values of liberal democracy within the framing and shaping conditions and the processes of formation of public opinion.

The transformation of the nation state, which has been, as Stuart Hall pointed out,[14] a crucial system of cultural representation, is a part of the complex shifting between public and private spheres, or, as one could argue, a part of the decline of the public sphere. The claim for the emergence of the European public sphere is nothing less than the claim for a new concept of the public sphere itself.[15] As Jeffrey Alexander put it:

> We need a new concept of civil society as a civil sphere, a world of values and institutions that generates capacity for social criticism and democratic integration at the same time. Such a sphere relies on solidarity, on feelings for others whom we do not know but whom we respect out of principle, not experience, because of our persuasive commitment to a common secular faith.[16]

I agree with Eriksen and Fossum who claim that arguments about the weakness of the European public sphere are usually imbued by an insufficient conceptual grasp.[17] Arguments about the existence or non-existence of the European public sphere are dependent upon the conceptualisation of the notion. Primarily we should not conceptualise the European public sphere as a separate entity. We should talk about the Europeanisation of particular and various public spheres,[18] as well

as about an overarching European public sphere.

Social scientists recognise that the plurality of both conflicting and complementary public spheres has been the very essence of emerging public spheres from the early modernity.[19] Therefore, using the singular in relation to the public sphere is, to say the least, misleading. Public life in a pluralistic society cannot take place within a singular public sphere. That is the way Craig Calhoun suggests using the notion of a "sphere of publics" rather than "public sphere."[20] The same argument submits Nancy Fraser who asserts that the proliferation of public spheres' plurality should not be perceived as a dangerous sign of social cleavage, nor as a threat to democracy.[21] Mutual respect and recognition among actors from competitive public spheres and discourses, as Fraser convincingly proved while analysing the emergence of the feminist public, this meant "more" not "less" democracy.[22]

This argument is very relevant with respect to the conceptualisation of a European public sphere. Similar to the institutionalisation of political discussion at the nation state level, a European public sphere is only conceivable as an amalgam of multiple, multilevel, complementary, divergent and convergent public spheres, as a sphere of European publics. Such plurality of Europeanised public spheres does not rule out the emergence of an overarching public sphere on a supranational level, but such a public sphere should not be singled out as the only sign of a European public sphere. The very principle of democracy implies the formation of public spheres around decision-making centres.[23] Major preconditions for such an overarching public sphere is, according to Fraser,[24] sufficient consensus about "expressive forms" and "persuasion protocol" which guarantee meaningful discussions and openness for agreements. Meaningful public discussion requires a shared framework of discursive environment, where conflicts and interests are represented and managed.

An Operational Account of the European Public Sphere

More specifically towards normative dimension of the notion, Habermas operationalised a European public sphere as 'a public political sphere which enables citizens to take positions at the same time on the same topics of the same relevance.'[25] Inspired by him, Klaus Eder and Cathleen Kantner have formulated the following criteria of a Eu-

ropean public sphere: there is a European public sphere if there are discussed the same issues at the same time with the same criteria of relevance (or, with the same frame of reference).[26] These criteria presume that a transnational European public sphere can be built through the Europeanisation of the various national media discourses. By "the same frame of reference" one means consent about conflicting interpretations of a given problem. This criterion corresponds with what Fraser calls as consensus about "expressive forms" and "persuasion protocol."[27] As Risse points out, we have to agree on what the problem is or, at least, which potential interpretations of the problem exist so that we know what we are talking about.[28] By the same criteria of relevance is not meant a European perspective based on a European identity, but a common interpretation of the problem that includes controversial opinions on the particular question.

As for the empirical research on the European public sphere which follows the above mentioned criteria, recent surveys indicate three firm outcomes: (1) that media reporting on "European affairs" in national media discourses has been until quite recently rather sparse, bleak and very often negative,[29] although (2) that the last 20 years showed that national media have not only increased their coverage of EU policies and events,[30] but they are, to a great extent, discussing the same issues at the same time and (3) that frames of reference and meaning structures did not vary much across national discourses.[31]

Following the Eder/Kantner criteria, we might conclude that sizeably increased salience of the EU affairs in the national media, as well as similarities in time and frames of reference indicate that the criteria for the Europeanised public sphere have been met.[32] Despite that, there have been ongoing concerns, as some authors rightly argued,[33] that political communication within the EU has suffered huge *mediatic deficit*, which maintains a great deal of civic ignorance and withdrawal from politics.[34]

The multiple EUs crisis certainly has changed such minimal visibility of the EU since heuristic of the crisis naturally attracts much more media attention.[35] Although, as Neverla pointed out,[36] media prefer mediation of crises impacts over crises causes and remedies. Koopmans and Statham research which employed the innovative method of claims analysis shows, that the EU does not remain invisible but the sphere of European publics remains insufficiently inclusive.[37] Governments and media actors are grossly overrepresented, to the detriment

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of other interest groups. In the face of the on-going euro crisis, we may wonder whether these findings continue to hold.

Let us move towards the second hypothesis which asserts that the Europeanisation of public spheres is conducive for the Europeanisation of identities, and that porous active borders are the key component of these trans/forming processes.

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Europeanised Identities, Public Spheres and Active Borders (Hypothesis 2)

Risse adds to the Eder/Kantner criteria of a European public sphere the third criterion with three indicators, and which takes up the debate about the relations between collective identities and the trans/formation of public spheres.[38] The first indicator of his criterion concerns the degree to which fellow European citizens are no longer treated as "foreigners", but as legitimate speakers. With respect to the normative dimension of the notion of public sphere, participant from over the border should not be treated as "foreigners" interfering domestic affairs.[39] Second indicator of his criterion suggests that actors should be able to operate within a common discourse and to form a common arena of communication which stretches across the porous borders of competing national discourses. The European public sphere assumes that actors treat each other as legitimate speakers in the many public spheres within the EU as opposed to creating boundaries using self/other distinctions. His third indicator concerns about framing the particular issues as common European problems. Such an emerging European community of communication refers to the development of a common European perspective on issues of European concern. It does not mean that speakers in the transnational public sphere adopt a neutral position above partisanship or that they agree on the issues at stake. It rather means that speakers refer to the EU, or Europe, as "us" and debating a particular issue as issues of common European concern.[40]

In terms of the empirical research following the above mentioned criterion (and its three indicators), there seem to be too few surveys to draw a robust conclusion. That opens doors for a more speculative approach. The older literature on public spheres assumed that identity is a precondition for its emergence. This argument is based on the essen-

tialist assumption that citizens enter the public sphere with a formed identity, positions, and interest. If there is no collective identity, there cannot be any public sphere.[41] Such an approach underestimates the role of the public sphere in the re/construction of identities. It is reasonable to believe that public spheres constitute the site where identities have emerged and where they are being de/constructed and re/constructed. People's positions, orientations and identities are formed, could be formed, and, as proponents of deliberative democracy suggest, should be formed within communicative interactions, while being confronted with a varieties of re/presentations of interests and opinions.[42] The Europeanisation of public spheres and the emergence of transnational identities (communities of communication) are fairly recent phenomena, which have followed rather then led the process of European integration.[43]

Following Risses third criterion I would claim that the Europeanisation of public spheres is determined by emergence of *active borders*. Europeans need to learn how to treat both territorial and symbolic borders as specific cultural forms which enable to exercise and practise cross border communication. Such communication should allow for a better understanding of *difference* rather than constructing or reproducing it. *Active borders* should support and produce both public criticism and social integration without generating antagonism towards those from "over borders." In other words, active borders should treat such cultural encounters which support *unity in diversity* and avoids *polarisation*.[44] Active borders should guarantee a common discursive space that allows the free re/construction of identities and the on-going cultural pluralisation. The concept of active border presumes the post-representational approach to culture, which is not something that is border lined, but permanently opens to the process of social self-creation, and which does not stress inside/outside dimensions.

With respect to the inside/outside (us/them) dimensions of identity, the concept of active border could as well be grafted upon the typology of Edward Shils,[45] which distinguishes the three codes of collective identity: primordial, sacred and civil. The active border is characterised by porous and permeable number of access points or channels, whereas the passive border is characterised by a communicational impermeability. While the primordial code of collective identity has borders, which are passive on both of its sides, the sacred code of collective identity implies the border, which is active on its outer side (inward)

and passive on its inner side (outward); integration through assimilation is feasible. The assimilation entails adapting cultural forms and patterns, rather than diluting established practices and adhering to practices that are foreign to a given "inside" culture. Finally, the civil code of collective identity seeks to foster active borders on both of its sides (inbound and outbound).

Active borders determine a mutual communication and understanding of *others*, as opposed to passive borders that seduce to the stereotypical labelling, defining and preserving polarity. The concept of active border seeks for such cultural and institutional preconditions existing on both sides of a border which guarantee a shared discursive space for actors from both sides. The concept of active border claims to present a nexus which connects the reflexive dynamics between identities, public spheres and polities towards democratic integration, social criticism and public learning.

Methods of Communication and European Positive Identities

The concept of European political identity (demos) is crucial for the understanding of the European public sphere. Following Risse's third criterion of Europeanised public spheres and the concept of *active borders*, it seems productive to employ into our conceptual cluster the concept of positive/negative identity.[46] In resonance with Risses third criterion I suggest that European identity should be primarily seen as a complex of multiple positive identities which encapsulates an attempt to overcome the biasness of national identities and consciousness.[47]

The EU's need for an active search for legitimacy could prove, after all, to be an advantage of the EU over national governments, which tend to rely on static social segments and nested collective identities.[48] National identities are, to great extent, defined as negative identities.[49] The EU should strive to maintain and foster the environment which allows the reflexive and open identity formation. It should foster a means of reducing pathological tendencies in the identity formation. European civil society could be defined as a niche providing these very resources, and creating chances for the open and reflexive identity formation based on the principles of competence and social integrity. Such situation could provide the method for creating European identities, which I suggest to perceive – with respect to an individual agency

and a prescriptive (and dynamic) dimension of identity (aspirations) – rather than as a singular collective identity, as (strive for) multiple (and complementary) positive identities. Such conditions could work towards the de/re/construction of collective identities in Europe; and could work towards invoking the European identity in a stronger sense, if needed. Positive identities are most likely to work towards active borders and complementary inclusive identities and negative identities towards passive borders, exclusive identities and discrimination.

After all, such assumptions are echoed in some empirical research. Risse convincingly interprets the spread of Euroscepticism as a specific sign of Europeanisation itself; even most adamant opponents of the EU also take it for granted nowadays.[50] At the same time, the Europeanised identities come in "national colours" too, as they resonate with national symbols and narratives in many different ways. The Europeanisation of national identities in the elite discourse does not necessarily result in a uniform and homogenous European identity; it rather comes within elements of predominantly complementary and inclusive (positive) identities.[51]

Empirical research supports another assumption, and that is that Europeanised public discourse is showing a new transnational cleavage.[52] Rather than choose "the EU – yes/no," two different and competing visions of the EU stand out. On the one hand, there is a vision of *positive identity Europe;* open, inclusive and cosmopolitan Europe that embodies the values of liberalism, enlightenment and discursive ethics. On the other hand there is a vision of *negative identity Europe* which is closed and exclusionary "fortress of Europe" which is based on the essentialist interpretation of the Christian heritage and forging a distinct European nationalism; such nationalism is less connected to the nation state and increasingly connected to the EU itself. This cleavage is increasingly visible in many member states and, according to Risse, is likely to structure the politicisation of European affairs in the future.[53]

European integration generates winners and losers. On average, the winners have been the younger, the better educated, and wealthier and the more politically informed part of the population, their European identity is strongly correlated with cosmopolitan and other liberal values.[54] The winners were able to exploit the opportunities of transnational mobility and as a result, they identify with the EU. *"Open" Europeans* enjoy, treat and explore *active* porous borders of collective identities and discourses throughout their competence and commu-

nicative skills. On average the losers have been those who profit less from economic integration and find it distressing to handle the pressure of transnational markets, they were older and less educated, do not travelled very much and have less exposure to foreigners than the winners; *"Closed" Europeans* tend to guard and foster passive impermeable borders of their nested and stereotypical identities and discourses.[55] We may wonder, whether and how the economic crises in the EU is going to change positions and attributes of these "open" and "closed" Europeans .

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Nevertheless, I claim that European identities shall not be conceived in conventional terms. The main characteristics of European identity should not be a definition of "borders" by creating the dichotomy of "us" and "them." In what sense identities could be comprehended as post-conventional? To build complementary, multiple and positive identities is feasible and imaginable only through specific methods of civil, multi- and transnational communication. As Giddens argues, in the condition of radicalised modernity civic engagement, communication and participation, which are recognised as fair and open, create crucial preconditions for strengthening and establishing bonds of belonging and solidarity, and therefore positive identities.[56]

The concept of European identity as specific means and rules of communication, dialogue and participation presumes a post-conventional procedure-like concept of identity with a dominance of the civil code elements in collective identity; hence the claim of constitutional patriotism comes into play and its emphasis on the value of rules in the process of communication.[57] As Outhwaite puts it,[58] the procedures of not reaching consensus are as important (if not more) as the procedures of reaching consensus, and they should be recognised as a key factor of European political culture and as a decisive precondition to form a collective identity in any stronger sense. Simply, put the character of decision-making processes and of the processes within civil society, which are recognised by their participants as fair and open, matters more, in some sense, than the particular outcomes of these processes.

Since modern societies are featured by a complex reorganisation of time-space relations, it is more accurate to comprehend society as an open system of communication, rather than as an integrated social system of shared meanings and morals which is embedded in a local context. Societies are nowadays, first of all, communicating so-

cieties, networks of mobility, and flows and social communication.[59] Therefore identities, including European ones, should be understood as a project, whose main objective is active participation in the process of fair and open communication within spheres of European publics.

Communication itself could (and should) be the main overarching defining characteristic of European identities, which resembles, as Stuart Hall brilliantly pointed out, "routes" rather than "roots."[60]

So far we have dealt with the first two hypotheses. I argued in favour of the claim that the formation of the European public sphere and the Europeanisation of public spheres in the EU are synergic and parallel processes, and that the Europeanisation of public spheres is conducive for the Europeanisation of identities. I introduced the concept of active border which plays the key role in these processes and creates a nexus between identities and public sphere transformations. Let us now focus on the 3rd and 4th hypotheses which assume that the Europeanisation of public spheres could be interpreted as a form of re/politicisation of public spheres in Europe, and that the politicisation of the EU could further support the Europeanisation of public spheres and collective identities in Europe.

Politicisation, Public Spheres and Political Identities (Hypotheses 3 and 4)

Although empirical findings suggest that we can observe a gradual emergence of the Europeanised public spheres which provide sites where the Europeanised identities are re/constructed,[61] according to many authoritative scholars in the field,[62] democracy in the EU, primary, does not suffer from the lack of a public sphere but from the lack of a political sphere.

Reinforcing the argument about reflexive relations between Europeanised public spheres and political identity (demos), we can employ the phenomenological analysis of the dynamics between the public sphere and political identities under communist regimes in CEE.[63] Such interpretation offers some possible clues for understanding the intrinsic affinity between the public sphere and the formation of political identities.

Is the EU Laggard in Political Modernisation?

Among the major deficits of the Communist regimes was the absence of the public sphere, which became a tool of social surveillance used

by Communist parties. The public sphere presents the cornerstone of political modernity and a crucial structural precondition enabling the formation and re/presentation of political positions and identities.[64] Without the arena for political contention, articulating conflicting issues during Communism was confined to the private sphere only. This situation, as Sztompka argued, did not allow for the institutionalisation of mechanisms needed for the civil resolution of existing conflicts, which contributed to accumulation of social tensions and hampered the formation of adequate political identities.[65] The ultimate loyalty, or subversive attitude, towards the political regime was the only alternative for any political agency. With no public sphere accessible to them, people were unable to interpret experiences of their everyday life as politically relevant; therefore there was no room for the formation of political identities.[66]

Where this analysis leaves us with respect to the Europeanisation of public spheres and identities? It indicates two general tendencies. 1) The lack of Europeanised public spheres has not allowed the forming of cross border political identities, which 2) only stokes the fire of Euroscepticism since people can only express either "ultimate loyalty" or "subversive attitude" towards an opaque technocratic machine of the EU. Simply put, the EU underperforms with respect to *political modernity*.[67]

In term of de-politicisation we have to bear in mind that the elitist approach towards integration has always been the norm and it has caused no problems as long as the "permissive consensus" was providing sufficient public support. The EU integration has never been an openly and publicly politicised project. Nevertheless, nowadays we may identify two crucial and mutually interconnected depoliticising forces within the EU politics. The first is related to its institutional design, the second, to the political culture of European elites.[68]

To start with the second, I agree with Risse that mainstream political parties are not well prepared for politicisation of the EU.[69] By leaving the politicisation of the EU to Eurosceptics, mainstream political parties are risking what they wanted to prevent – declining support for the EU. Controversies, discussions and polarised debates are part of vibrant public spheres, as long as speakers and audiences respect one another as part of a community of communication.[70] As for the first reason, as Jiří Přibáň argues,[71] the EU has been symbolically constructed as a civil alternative to ethnic nationalism. This became very

obvious in the course of the Eastern enlargement. The EU 'politics of de-politicisation' has evolved into a set of institutional instruments for consensual national and international policy-making based on permanent negotiations and compromises. Consequently, political contention has been replaced by legal and bureaucratic procedures leaving little room for EU-scale democracy; this is why Přibáň critically calls the EU a legalistic project.[72] His analysis reveals that the European shift towards de-politicisation and technocratic legalisation that has been for the most of its history, appreciated by many as a major advantage of the EU, could be at the same time a very serious limitation, pitfall and shortcoming for its future and further democratisation.

Habermas himself pointed out in his famous book on Öffentlichkeit that the crucial precondition for the public sphere to emerge was the legal installation of permanent political opposition, which heralded the emergence of the modern political sphere.[73] Permanent political opposition served as guarantor of a vital and independent public sphere, which provided a public arena for articulating relevant positions, and created a reservoir of discursive, organisational and symbolic forms, which people could identify with. Political aspects of everyday life could then be transferred into articulated and represented political orientations and identities within the public sphere.

Polarisation and contention are important preconditions for the emergence of Europeanised public spheres. European public spheres come into being when people discuss about (European) controversial issues. The politicisation of European affairs, analogously to identities and public spheres, is likely to take place through the Europeanisation of domestic politics.[74] EU affairs must become part of "normal politics."[75] Given the scale of de-politicisation within national public spheres (driven also by the tabloid media and political populism), the Europeanisation of domestic politics can be interpreted as a form of re-politicisation of public spheres in Europe. The re-politicisation of the public sphere should be facilitated and carried out through treating the active borders between diverse discourses and identities. As Vivien Schmidt described pointedly,[76] the EU suffers a democratic deficit from having "policies without politics", and the national states suffer from institutional incapacity by having "politics without policies", and this is not good news for European democracy and civil societies. This epitomises a crucial incongruity between localities where mass politics and political mobilisation take place and where decisions are

made.[77]

This situation fosters extreme polarisation of "ultimate loyalty" on the on hand, and "subversive attitude" on the other. This extreme polarisation of public opinions in Europe support the formation of passive borders, and this is furthermore exacerbated by the absence of swinging dynamics between government and opposition, which epitomises a rejuvenating capacity of any democratic polity to maintain public trust and to reduce civic discontent or frustration. As Hix put it, in a democracy when voters are dissatisfied with their situation they do not blame the whole system, but the incumbent government.[78] On the other hand, the EU citizens who disagree with EU policies do not manage to identify a governing and responsible coalitions, or any other political subject which could replace it; therefore they have only one option – to blame the EU as the whole.

Many social scientists support the argument that neutralising the politics of unanimous consensus presents a major obstacle to further democratisation of the EU, and it stifles the emergence of media and a public sphere at the same time.[79] Politicisation of the EU would enable re/presentation of conflicting arguments and interests which would bring the attention of the media and help to reduce the above mentioned deficit of information and political communication.

In other words, without a proper political sphere and arena of political contention in the EU we cannot expect a strengthening of Europeanised public spheres and political identities. And without Europeanised public spheres, relevant social conflicts cannot be properly re/presented and institutionalised. This undermines possibilities to hold on to democratic decision making, and to form a democratic political will beyond the nation state. Without such preconditions, we only risk the growth of social pressure, and that political orientations and identities will only be formed in the extreme positions of acceptance or resistance. After all, the available data show,[80] indeed, that such extreme positions are common among EU citizens. In the face of the current euro crisis, both visibility and contention of EU affairs seem more prominent than ever, and it still remains to be seen whether and how the dynamic of euro crisis impacts relations between public spheres, polities and identities trans/formation in Europe.

Conclusion

The main argument of this paper asserts that the Europeanisation of identities, the Europeanisation of public spheres and the Europeanisation of nation states are to a great extent parallel and mutually reflexive processes which have been feeding from each other and could complement each other towards a more legitimate and effective governance in the EU. Building the European framework of democratic governance, developing the European public sphere and encouraging the European identity/ties (demos) formation are intrinsically connected processes. The *novel* concept of European civil society also suggests that the democratic deficit of the EU has both institutional and socio-cultural aspects which affect each other in reflexive relations. This framework of analysis offers the broad sociological context in which questions about the Europeanisation of public spheres and identities should be discussed in order to interpret and understand relations between identities, public spheres and polities' trans/formations.

The concept of active border (which is both normative and analytical) was interpreted as the key component for the formation of European civil society. The active border allows synergic trans/formation of public spheres and identities in order to construct the civil code of collective identity. The civil code is based on common discursive space which works towards democratic inclusion and public learning, and which fosters positive and complementary identities. The Europeanisation of domestic politics, public spheres and political identities, and the politicisation of EU affairs seem to be not only reflexive and complementary processes, but also desirable from democratic point of view. When the public sphere is lacking and the political sphere is opaque, the citizens, deprived of the chance to adopt any precise political orientation, can only regard the political regime with growing disengagement and distrust, which can contribute to the construction of passive borders. Empirical findings suggest that we can observe the gradual emergence of Europeanised public spheres which provide sites where Europeanised identities (including the sceptical ones) are constructed.[81] Although such development remains uneven, the EU seems to be the community of communication in the making. Further politicisation of the EU might deepen these tendencies although it remains to be seen how much of the politicisation the EU can absorb in order to keep containing vicious forces of ethnic nationalisms. Furthermore, thorough interpretation of preconditions supporting and treating active borders remains an important task for both theoretical analysis

and empirical research.

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Notes

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2   Müller, Karel B. (2006), 'The Civil Society-State Relationship in Contemporary Discourse: A Complementary Account from Giddens' Perspektive,' The British Journal of Politics and International Relations 8:2, pp. 311-330..
3   Risse, Thomas (2010), A Community of Europeans? Transnational Identities and Public Spheres. Ithaca/London: Cornell University Press.
4   Habermas, Jürgen (2001), The Postnational Constellation: Political Essays. Cambridge: Polity Press. See also Hix, Simon (2008), What is wrong with the EU and how to fix it. Cambridge: Polity Press.
5   On the issues of Czechoslovak Latin-American diplomatic relatI am aware of a dilemma between collective and individual identity which has been addressed by many scholars including myself (Müller, Karel B. (2007), 'Search for a European Identity – Psycho-Sociological Perspective. An Attempt at Agency Approach,' Central European Journal of International & Security Studies 1:1, pp. 100–112. Collective identity could be understood as an overlap of individual identities. Nevertheless, identity is always a part of subjective identity (unless we talk about ascribed or inflicted iden-

tities). By overstating the notion of collective identity we are at risk of the methodological nationalism. In this paper I try to combine both perspectives. When emphasizing an individual agency context I talk about identity, when stressing a structural context I refer to collective or political identity, although it is often impossible to take these two contexts analytically apart.

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10   For more detailed interpretation see Müller (2006).

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20   Calhoun, Craig (1995), Critical Social Theory. Oxford: Blackwell, p.

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22 Fraser (1999), p. 124.
23 Tocqueville (1968).
24 Fraser (1999), p. 123.
25 Habermas (1996), p. 306.
26 Eder, Klaus and Cathleen Kantner (2000), 'Transnationale Reso-
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28 Risse (2010), p. 19.
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    European Societies 9:5, pp. 685-704. See also Neverla, Irene (2007),
    'The Birth of a European Public Sphere Through European Media
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    705-718, or Trenz (2008).
30 Koopmans and Statham (2010).
31 See Risse (2010), see also Trenz (2008).
32 Risse (2010), p. 136.
33 Golding (2007). See also Mörä, Tuomo (2008), 'Ideals of European
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    mas 3:23, pp. 86-98..
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competence in productive, social, and personal relations. The second rests on a sense of integrity within a sensible world of meaning. The inability to assert our competence and to be an integral part of a community causes the identity crises. See Hoover, Keith (1997), The Power of Identity. Politics in a New Key. Chatham. N.J.: Chatham, p. 66.

47 For more see Müller (2007).
48 Eriksen and Fossum (2000).
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51 Risse (2010), p. 85.
52 Risse (2010) chapter 3.
53 Risse (2010), p. 245.
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67 This comparison does not in any way imply that one can interpret the normative likelihood between communist regimes and the EU. The parallel made of these two very different systems merely seeks to interpret certain structural (and very interesting) similarities of dynamics in determining formation of the public sphere and col-

lective identities in these two otherwise very essentially different political regimes, similarities that can be in generic terms described as deficit of political modernity.

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79 Such as Hix (2008), Mörä (2008), Přibáň (2007).
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